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Talbot, Point P D-1

The Moroccan-Algerian rapprochement of recent weeks has been generated more from an increasingly pragmatic Algerian foreign policy than from a sudden shift in either country's position over the Western Sahara dispute. Algerian President Bendjedid's recent meetings with Moroccan King Hassan, Tunisia's Bourguiba, and Libya's Jallud are aimed at reducing area tensions and thus allowing Algeria to focus more energy and resources on internal development and to pursue economic projects with its neighbors. It is also intended to reduce opportunities for Libyan troublemaking and superpower involvement in the region.

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Both Bendjedid and Hassan would like to put the Saharan conflict behind them because both probably believe that it adversely affects regional stability. The cost for both sides was certainly another factor. Whether the two leaders are serious about resolving the dispute or simply have agreed to set it aside for the sake of improved economic cooperation, depends largely on whether both sides are willing to compromise on the fundamental issue of who is going to control and have sovereignty over what territory in the Sahara. So far, we have no evidence that either side is considering major concessions, although new negotiating methods and formulas for achieving a settlement are under active consideration.

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Algeria is still committed to self determination for the Polisario for reasons that are more important than just the support of a revolutionary principle. Algeria, the Polisario's main backer, is interested in maintaining its control over the guerrillas and any shift in its support would make it more difficult to control assistance from Libya or other external sources like Cuba or the Soviet Union. Moreover, we do not believe Bendjedid is prepared to see Morocco's size, resources, and prestige enhanced significantly by the full incorporation of the Sahara.

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Any compromise Bendjedid might make with Morocco would probably be met with little internal disapproval. Most Algerians see the dispute in Western Sahara as an issue of anti-colonialization--a point that could be dealt with cosmetically with relative ease. Bendjedid has the full support of the army, the real power brokers in Algeria. The FLN is primarily a rubber stamp organization that has been purged of its radical elements and would have limited input in negotiating a solution anyway.

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A settlement of the Western Sahara dispute is not yet on the horizon, in our view, and renewed serious fighting is always a possibility, but a remote one, at this point. Bendjedid's initiatives over the past few months suggest that he will not let the issue stand in the way of pursuing greater Maghreb cooperation. He and Hassan seem to have reached a tacit

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NESA M#83-10086

-1-
SECRET

SECRET

understanding that the status quo--minimal squirmishes with both Morocco and the Polisario controlling territory--is acceptable and that renewed talks might uncover areas for compromise. If not, the process of negotiation at least allows the two countries to go forward with bilateral cooperation.

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SUBJECT: Talking Points for the DCI

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